

ORIGINAL

REMARKS

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MR. PRESIDENT, MR. SECRETARY-GENERAL, DIRECTOR GENERAL MAHLER, EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: AS SURGEON GENERAL AND DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL HEALTH IT HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE TO REPRESENT MY COUNTRY AT THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY. I AM HONORED TO APPEAR BEFORE THIS IMPORTANT BODY THIS AFTERNOON.

MR. PRESIDENT, THE UNITED NATIONS WAS CREATED WITH HOPE AND PROMISE FOLLOWING A PERIOD OF DESPAIR AND DEVASTATION. AND, IN A WAY, THAT IS WHAT I WANT TO TALK ABOUT TODAY -- HOPE AMID DESPAIR, PROMISE AMID DEVASTATION.

I AM REFERRING, OF COURSE, TO A DISEASE THIS ENTIRE PLANET FACES -- THE DISEASE KNOWN AS AIDS. THIS IS A DISEASE THAT MOST OFTEN CUTS DOWN THOSE IN THE PRIME OF THEIR LIVES. IT KILLS THE POOR AND IT KILLS THE AFFLUENT. AND IT IS DISEASE THAT KNOWS NO GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES. POPULATIONS OF ALL COUNTRIES ARE VULNERABLE TO ATTACK.

I WELCOME THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S DECISION TO DISCUSS THIS FRIGHTENING DISEASE. AND I WELCOME THE RESOLUTION PLACED BEFORE YOU, COMMENDING THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR ITS IMPRESSIVE EFFORTS TO COORDINATE THE ATTACK ON THIS AWESOME THREAT, AND URGING ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS IN ALL COUNTRIES TO INITIATE WHERE NECESSARY AND IMPROVE WHERE POSSIBLE THEIR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS. MY DELEGATION SINCERELY HOPES THIS RESOLUTION IS ADOPTED BY CONSENSUS.

I COME TO THIS CHAMBER TODAY NOT AS A DIPLOMAT, BUT AS A PHYSICIAN. AND I COME TO YOU WITH A PHYSICIAN'S PLEA. MY PLEA IS FOR GREATER COMPASSION AND FOR INTENSIFIED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION UNDER THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. IT IS A PLEA FOR ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD, AND ALL THEIR COMPONENT PARTS -- IN THE HEALTH COMMUNITY, THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY, THE SOCIAL SERVICE COMMUNITY, INDUSTRY, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS -- TO MOBILIZE THEIR ENERGIES AND THEIR RESOURCES AND TO ESCALATE THEIR COMMON FIGHT AGAINST AIDS.

IN EACH OF OUR COUNTRIES, WE MUST START WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISEASE AND AN ACCEPTANCE THAT IT IS A RISK TO THE ENTIRE SOCIETY, AND NOT JUST TO ONE OR MORE NARROW GROUPS. I RECOGNIZE THAT THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERS IN SOME COUNTRIES MAY NOT HAVE WANTED, AT THE START, TO COLLECT AND PUBLISH DATA ON AN EPIDEMIC SUCH AS THIS. BUT WE CANNOT TRULY UNDERSTAND A DISEASE, MUCH LESS STOP IT, IF WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE IT IS AND HOW IT ACTS. I BELIEVE THAT THE UNDER-REPORTING OF AIDS COULD BE RETARDING OUR PROGRESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST IT, AND I AM PLEASED TO LEARN THAT W.H.O. HAS MADE ADVANCES IN STIMULATING MORE OPENNESS AND MORE HONESTY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THIS PROBLEM. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT ALL DELEGATIONS HERE WILL URGE THAT THIS GROWING OPENNESS CONTINUE.

WE ALSO NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT, WHILE AIDS IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM, IT IS POTENTIALLY MORE DESTRUCTIVE TO THE DEVELOPING WORLD THAN IT IS TO THE INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD.

IN DEVELOPING NATIONS, THE PEOPLE STRICKEN WITH AIDS ARE PRIMARILY THOSE WE LOOK TO FOR SUPPORT OF THE CHILDREN, THE AGED, AND THE SICK. DEATHS AMONG THESE BREADWINNERS CAUSE BOTH FAMILY INCOME AND NUTRITION TO DECLINE, WHILE POVERTY AND DISEASE INCREASE, MAKING AIDS A MAJOR THREAT TO FAMILY LIFE.

BUT THERE IS MORE. BECAUSE AIDS STRIKES THE HEALTHY AND USUALLY THE YOUNG PRODUCTIVE ADULT IN THE PRIME OF LIFE, AIDS IS ALSO A HINDERANCE TO DEVELOPMENT. DEVELOPING NATIONS WILL BE LOSING WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY, AND MANY OTHER VITAL ECONOMIC AREAS, NOT TO MENTION TEACHERS, ENGINEERS, PHYSICIANS, HEALTH WORKERS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AND MANY OTHER PROFESSIONALS. THESE ARE TALENTED PEOPLE THAT NO COUNTRY, AND ESPECIALLY NOT A DEVELOPING COUNTRY, CAN AFFORD TO LOSE.

AND BEYOND THAT, THERE ARE THE INNOCENT VICTIMS, THE CHILDREN, THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD, WHO ARE AND CONTINUE TO BE AFFLICTED WITH AIDS. MR. PRESIDENT, THE SAD FACT IS THAT AIDS CAN ROLL BACK THE GLOBAL CHILD SURVIVAL EFFORTS OF BOTH UNICEF AND W.H.O. AND UNDERMINE ALL OF THE HARD-WON VICTORIES IN REDUCING INFANT MORTALITY.

THERE ARE MANY OTHER UNPLEASANT SCENARIOS. TOURISM MAY SUFFER DUE TO UNREASONABLE FEARS ABOUT HOW AIDS IS CONTRACTED. FOREIGN INVESTMENT MAY FALTER, AS WELL, BECAUSE AIDS MAY BE LEADING TO REDUCED LOCAL MARKETS AND REDUCED SKILLED LABOR, NOT TO MENTION RISING HEALTH CARE COSTS.

FURTHER, THE EXPENSES ASSOCIATED WITH DEALING WITH AIDS WILL INEVITABLY TAKE FUNDS AND PERSONNEL FROM OTHER PROGRAMS IN HEALTH, EDUCATION AND OTHER VITAL SECTORS, AND THUS JEOPARDIZE GAINS ALREADY MADE IN THOSE AREAS. AIDS CAN DEFEAT THE PURPOSES OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE THAT INTERNATIONAL BANKS AND INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES HAVE PROVIDED.

NO, IT IS NOT FAIR THAT THOSE WHOSE POTENTIAL LOSSES ARE SO THREATENING MAY BE HIT THE HARDEST. BUT THE REALITY IS THAT AIDS CAN DEFEAT A DEVELOPING NATION'S HOPES FOR THE FUTURE. ALTOGETHER, THESE ARE VERY SAD POSSIBILITIES TO CONSIDER.

IN THE INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD, THE CONSEQUENCES ARE ALSO VERY GREAT. WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN THIS IN THE UNITED STATES. MY COUNTRY IS NOT THE MOST AFFECTED COUNTRY IN PER CAPITA TERMS, BUT, AS YOU ALL KNOW, HAS MORE CASES THAN ANY OTHER NATION. WHAT WE HAVE SEEN IS THIS:

- o 43,000 AIDS CASES HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE UNITED STATES, WITH 25,000 DEATHS. WE ESTIMATE THAT 1.5 MILLION ADDITIONAL AMERICANS ARE INFECTED BY THE AIDS VIRUS, AND CAN SPREAD IT TO OTHERS, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY CURRENTLY SHOW NO SIGNS OF ILLNESS. PRESENT DATA INDICATE THAT 30 TO 50 PERCENT OF INFECTED INDIVIDUALS CAN BE EXPECTED TO DEVELOP AIDS WITHIN 7 YEARS OF FIRST BECOMING INFECTED.

- o WE NOW KNOW THAT THE COSTS ARE ASTRONOMICAL, EVEN FOR A COUNTRY WITH AS MANY RESOURCES AS THE UNITED STATES. TREATMENT CAN COST \$50,000, AND PERHAPS MORE, FOR A SINGLE PATIENT. WE ESTIMATE THAT BY 1991 THE COSTS OF TREATING AIDS IN THE UNITED STATES WILL HAVE REACHED BETWEEN 8 AND 16 BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR.
- o AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE MAKING TRULY REMARKABLE STRIDES IN RESEARCH. WE HAVE LEARNED MORE ABOUT AIDS IN 6 YEARS THAN WE DID ABOUT POLIO IN 40 YEARS, OR ABOUT WHOOPING COUGH IN SEVERAL GENERATIONS. BUT THERE ARE LIMITS TO THIS KNOWLEDGE. PRESIDENT REAGAN HAS POINTED OUT THAT "SCIENCE IS CLEARLY CAPABLE OF BREATHTAKING ADVANCES, BUT IT'S NOT CAPABLE OF MIRACLES." HE'S RIGHT. EVEN IF WE ARE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A VACCINE, BECAUSE OF THE LONG INCUBATION PERIOD OF AIDS, IT WILL TAKE YEARS TO KNOW IF THAT VACCINE IS EFFECTIVE.

ONE THING THAT CAN BE DONE IN THE SHORT TERM, HOWEVER, THAT WILL HELP PRESERVE TOURISM, BUSINESS, AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT, IS TO RESOLVE TO MAKE THE WORLD'S BLOOD SUPPLY SAFE FOR TRANSFUSION. COULD WE DO THIS, ALL OF US WORKING TOGETHER, SAY BY 1991? WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES TO DO IT. THIS IS AN AREA WHERE THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD COULD COME TOGETHER AND DO SOMETHING THAT IS FOR EVERYONE'S BENEFIT. VICTORY OVER THIS ONE SMALL FACET OF THE AIDS PANDEMIC WILL HELP BIND US TOGETHER IN OUR STRUGGLE TO CONTAIN THE SCOURGE OF AIDS. WE CALL ON W.H.O. TO GIVE THIS HIGH PRIORITY.

AIDS IS SUCH A DEVASTATING DISEASE THAT THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ETHICAL AFTERSHOCKS WILL LAST LONGER THAN THE DISEASE ITSELF. MY OWN COUNTRY IS SUFFERING AND IN MANY CASES MY FELLOW CITIZENS ARE CONFUSED AND ANGRY.

WITH THIS BACKGROUND, IN THE UNITED STATES WE HAVE DECLARED AIDS TO BE OUR PRIORITY PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM. A MASSIVE RESEARCH EFFORT IS UNDERWAY. WE HAVE UNDERTAKEN EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS TO INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT AIDS AND THE MEANS TO PREVENT IT, AND TO TRY TO DISPEL THE MYTHS AND FEARS THAT CAN LEAD TO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE VICTIMS OF AIDS. OF COURSE, WE ARE ALSO SUPPORTING BILATERAL COOPERATIVE EFFORTS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS THROUGH OUR AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND WE ARE COOPERATING FULLY WITH THE EFFORTS OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. W.H.O. HAS DEVELOPED HIGHLY SENSIBLE AND IMPRESSIVE GUIDELINES FOR ACTION BY INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENTS, AND I BELIEVE IT IMPERATIVE THAT ALL COUNTRIES MAKE THEIR AIDS CONTROL PROGRAMS CONSISTENT WITH W.H.O. GUIDELINES.

MR. PRESIDENT, ONE REASON I CAME HERE TODAY WAS TO ENDORSE W.H.O.'S LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST AIDS. W.H.O.'S GLOBAL AIDS PROGRAM EMPHASIZES PREVENTION THROUGH EDUCATION, THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION, AND THE NEED FOR NATIONAL PROGRAM EFFORTS, DEVELOPED IN COOPERATION WITH W.H.O. IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT NO COUNTRY CAN FIGHT AIDS ON ITS OWN, AND THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING AUTHORITY OF W.H.O. IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. MY GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED MONEY AND EQUIPMENT AND MANPOWER TO ASSIST THE W.H.O. PROGRAM, AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO.

MR. PRESIDENT, I HAVE BEEN A SURGEON FOR ALMOST 50 YEARS, AND I HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH A THREAT AS AIDS. I AM PROUD TO BE A PART OF A TRADITION OF CARE THAT GOES BACK MORE THAN TWO MILLENIA, A TRADITION THAT WILL NOT ABANDON THE SICK AND THE DISABLED, WHOEVER THEY ARE. BUT, NOW, IN THIS EPIDEMIC, REPORTS ARE TRICKLING IN THAT SOME DOCTORS, NURSES, AND OTHER HEALTH CARE WORKERS, THROUGH UNFOUNDED FEAR CONCERNING THE TRANSMISSION OF AIDS ARE REFUSING TO CARE FOR PATIENTS WITH AIDS OR WHO THEY THINK HAVE AIDS. THIS BEHAVIOR ON THE PART OF A MISINFORMED AND FEARFUL MINORITY COULD DESTROY THE FABRIC OF TRADITIONAL HIPPOCRATIC MEDICINE. WE MUST NOT LET THAT HAPPEN.

WE MUST NOT ABANDON THOSE WHO NEED OUR HELP. JUST AS IMPORTANT WE MUST NOT ABANDON HOPE, OR ABANDON OUR COUNTRIES AND THEIR ECONOMIES TO THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF THIS PANDEMIC. CERTAINLY THERE ARE AND WILL BE THOSE WE CANNOT SAVE. BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT OUR SCIENTIFIC EFFORTS, TOGETHER WITH KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION, WILL EVENTUALLY STOP THIS TERRIBLE DISEASE.

AS WE SPEAK, PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN THE LABORATORY. PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN EDUCATION. AND AS THIS DISCUSSION ILLUSTRATES, PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.

LET US CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD WITH GOOD SENSE AND GOOD SCIENCE AND, TOGETHER, LET US GIVE THE WORLD SOMETHING EVERY BIT AS PRECIOUS AS A VACCINE AGAINST AIDS. LET US SHOW THE WORLD HOW COMPASSION AND ENLIGHTENMENT CAN TRIUMPH OVER DISEASE.

THANK YOU.